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PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN REGION

SUMMARY

The present document reports on and analyses major new trends and developments in UNICEF programme cooperation in the Americas and Caribbean region during 1994.

The UNICEF regional office has responsibility for cooperation in the following countries and territories: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Uruguay and Venezuela.

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I. REGIONAL OVERVIEW

1. The Latin America and Caribbean region continues to exhibit macroeconomic indicators that are more positive than those of the preceding decade. In general, fiscal deficits have been reduced and inflationary processes are under control. However, the stability and economic growth achieved in the region are still precarious. The modest economic growth has not been sufficient to generate the new jobs needed to reduce unemployment.

2. Economic reforms have not been accompanied by modernization of administration in the social sectors. The efficiency and equity of budget allocations have not increased and, in many countries of the region, social funds are used to bring temporary relief to the most evident manifestations of poverty, while necessary reforms have been postponed. In general, systems for the monitoring of social indicators are weak.

3. The above problems notwithstanding, basic indicators in the region will continue to improve, as they have over the past 30 years. All countries have formulated national programmes of action (NPAs) and continue to implement and monitor them. Significant efforts must continue in certain countries, including Bolivia, Brazil, Haiti and Honduras, among others, to achieve the goals for 1995. In the entire region, continued actions to mobilize greater and more sustained political support will be crucial if the World Summit for Children goals for the year 2000 are to be met. Administrative and political decentralization and municipal-level action will play important roles.

4. The challenges faced by the region in order to ensure economic growth, social development and the strengthening of democracy include (a) growth, together with productive employment (with a special emphasis on incorporating women in productive employment); (b) an emphasis on education, not only because of its impact on the growth of productivity, but as a right; (c) attention to the growing concentration of income and wealth in the hands of a tiny minority, including inequalities based on race and gender; and (d) enhancement of the notion of public interest and social responsibility, which have been diluted by the advance of the market economy and its emphasis on private and individual interests.

II. CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

5. All the Latin American and Caribbean countries, with Haiti being the most recent, have ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Many, however, are overdue in the submission of their first implementation reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Processes designed to adapt national legislation and tailor existing institutions have begun vigorously in several countries of the region, including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. Together with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Child Development Centre, wheels have been set in motion to define social policies to eradicate child labour and to protect juveniles in the workforce. Initiatives to prevent violence against children - both in the family and at institutional and social levels - are making headway in Brazil, Chile and Colombia, among other countries. Mobilization in defense of child rights meets with growing support in many non-governmental agencies, as well as in the churches and the mass media. Judges, the police force and lawyers have begun to play a new role in formulating and applying policies and legislation in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child; particular emphasis has been placed on the treatment of young people who fall afoul of the law. The growing political importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in UNICEF work in the region has meant that it has come to be seen as the basic programmatic framework for action in developing social

policies with women and children as their core concern. The regional office has played an active role in supplying technical assistance in matters of law reform, research, training and the production of communications material for the use of Governments and for UNICEF offices in each country.

III. DECADE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

6. Subscribed to by 28 Governments of the Americas in April 1994, the Nariño Accord reaffirmed the commitments of the World Summit for Children and the mid-decade goals; identified new areas of special concern, such as early pregnancies, disabilities and civic rights; and called for social investment to improve productivity and equity. As administrative decentralization becomes increasingly important, most countries are developing plans of action for children at the municipal level. This is supported by the development of networks of "Mayors as Defenders of Children" in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela.

7. The Nariño Accord has since been endorsed by the Fourth Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State, by the Central American Conference of Peace and Development and by the Summit of the Americas, convened by President Clinton of the United States of America.

A. Health and nutrition

8. In all countries in the region, except Bolivia, Brazil and Haiti, infant and under-five mortality rates are decreasing at the pace required to reach the goals of the World Summit for Children.

9. In 1994, the International Commission for the Certification of Polio Eradication concluded that the infection by wild polio virus has been interrupted in the western hemisphere. All countries, except Haiti, have already carried out measles vaccination campaigns for children under 15 years of age, resulting in the lowest rate of measles cases in the region to date - less than 10 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. At the XXIV Panamerican Health Conference in September 1994, a regional agreement was reached to advance towards the elimination of measles virus from the continent. The number of cases of neonatal tetanus also decreased dramatically, from 1,075 in 1990 to 652 in 1993. However, 12 per cent of the 12,500 health districts in the region are still considered as high risk, covering 26 per cent of the women of child-bearing age in the region (23 million).

10. The trend to reduce child deaths caused by acute respiratory infections (ARI) is slowly advancing in most countries. In Mexico, the goal was achieved in 1993, and in Argentina, Costa Rica and Uruguay, it will be reached by the end of 1994. Still, almost 60 per cent of all paediatric consultations are due to ARI, which require consistent implementation of case management strategies in all countries.

11. In April 1994, an interregional ministerial-level meeting, with the participation of the private sector, was convened by the President of Ecuador to define a plan of action for achieving universal salt iodization in the entire region. The meeting, held in Quito, was sponsored by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and UNICEF. Twenty-three Latin American and Caribbean countries signed the Quito Declaration, which calls on Governments to establish provisions to ensure that all salt for consumption is adequately iodized, among other things. Although the goal of universal salt iodization is considered feasible by the end of 1995, increased attention will be required in Brazil, Haiti and Paraguay (as an importer).

12. The mid-decade goal of the virtual elimination of vitamin A deficiency will be reached in all countries. Various strategies are being pursued, including the distribution of megadoses of vitamin A, fortification of sugar (Central America and Chile) and fortification of maize and wheat flour (Venezuela).

13. In Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Jamaica, the eastern Caribbean, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela, the mid-decade goal to increase the use of oral rehydration therapy (ORT) to 80 per cent for the control of diarrhoeal diseases has been reached. In Mexico, ORT coverage is expected to reach 90 per cent by 1995. Mexico also has decreased the mortality rate for children under five years of age due to diarrhoea by 56 per cent over the past three years, thus already reaching the goal set for the year 2000. Local production of oral rehydration salts (ORS) throughout the region is on the rise.

14. While significant progress has been made towards reaching the target for "baby-friendly" hospitals, acceleration will be necessary to reach the goal. All countries which needed policies to stop the distribution of free and low-cost supplies of breast-milk substitutes to hospitals and maternities have adopted them, but problems remain with respect to compliance and enforcement. Strong surveillance systems are needed. In some countries, efforts are under way to lengthen maternity leave and establish on-site facilities for breast-feeding.

15. The 20 per cent reduction in the prevalence of protein-energy malnutrition with respect to the 1990 level is feasible owing to improved health services, access to safe water supplies and sanitation, women's education and coverage of family planning services. In Brazil, the prevalence of protein-energy malnutrition has decreased from 17 per cent in 1973 to 7 per cent in 1990; yet, acute malnutrition may increase during 1994/1995 in north-east Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Suriname and Venezuela. Special efforts will be required also in Guatemala, Honduras and Peru.

16. Reduction of the maternal mortality rate is probably the most challenging of all goals in the region. Due to under-reporting, the regional estimate of 21,000 maternal deaths per year is presumably much lower than the real figure. Some 70 per cent of these deaths occur in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. An important cause is induced abortion. Education, family planning and the improvement of health and nutrition services during pregnancy, delivery and the post-partum period are the main strategies to achieve reductions.

B. Education

17. At least nine countries - Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay - need to make special efforts if they are to meet the goals for education by the end of the decade. In almost every country in the region, the school repetition and drop-out rates are still very high. The quality of education, especially at the primary level, continues to be the region's major challenge. In the English-speaking Caribbean, the educational performance of boys is an area of growing concern.

18. Several countries in the region - Bolivia, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras and Peru - have received support for developing multi-grade pedagogic strategies. With the help of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), prototype materials have been prepared in the sciences (health, nutrition, environment) and in education for democracy (resolving conflicts, tolerance, gender equity, child rights). The education of parents for child development is being fostered in the English-speaking Caribbean, which has taken the lead in the region.

IV. COOPERATION WITH REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

19. ILO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO have recently joined the region's Inter-agency Coordination Committee (ICC), which includes UNICEF, PAHO/the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development as members. Presently chaired by UNICEF, ICC coordinates and facilitates efforts to achieve the goals of the World Summit for Children and is committed to support the Nariño Accord. Coordinated efforts have been especially important in Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Honduras and Mexico. ICC has addressed technical issues pertinent to the region's efforts to achieve the goals, including decentralization, leadership and social mobilization.

20. Collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has included reporting on the relation between child education, health and nutrition and improved productivity, and analysing the investments that various social groups will need to make in order to achieve the goals defined at the World Summit for Children. UNICEF is working with ILO-Programa Regional del Empleo para América Latina y el Caribe (Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean) to document and design policies for the most vulnerable social groups, with a special focus on women and children.

21. Technical consultations with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) are ongoing in the areas of women's leadership, youth and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). IDB collaborates with UNICEF in the Programa de la Región Andina (Programme for the Andean Region), in projects for children in especially difficult circumstances for Central America and in child development and employment in Peru. A $20 million project is being finalized in the area of child rights/children in especially difficult circumstances in Argentina, and UNICEF has joined IDB in preparing a regional poverty alleviation project for the north-east of Brazil.

22. A programme of cooperation has been signed with the Inter-American Institute for Children and with the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights for training in legal affairs and child rights. Strategic alliances continue with the Andean Parliament, Rotary International, Jaycees, Boy Scouts, religious groups, the private sector and the mass media.

V. EXPERIENCE WITH THE APPLICATION OF RECENT BOARD POLICIES

A. Participation of United Nations agencies in the country programme exercise

23. In Argentina, Bolivia, Honduras, Mexico and Venezuela, the programming cycles of UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA are being harmonized with government planning cycles, in response to General Assembly resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992. Close collaboration with ECLAC, ILO, PAHO/WHO, UNDP, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UNFPA and UNESCO has continued at both country and regional levels, the latter through ICC.

B. Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

24. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has been ratified by all countries of the region. However, recent country studies indicate discrepancies between the Convention and national legislation. Work with the Andean and Central American Parliaments and the Network of Governmental Women's Bureaus continues to promote the revision of national

legislation. The network of journalists for women's rights also has been consolidated.

25. Studies carried out on the status of women of the Caribbean subregion and in some Latin American countries show that women are still underrepresented in the sharing of power and decision-making at most levels. A regional women's leadership programme is being designed and co-sponsored by IDB, UNIFEM, Inter-American Commission on Women/Organization of American States and UNICEF to promote the participation of women in public office at decision-making levels as a long-term contribution to child survival and development. Meetings of women parliamentarians and women mayors in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Paraguay are a first step in the creation of networks of women leaders at the country level. A media campaign on the role of women was conducted in Uruguay to sensitize public opinion and change perceptions, and work is under way with the organization of women communicators in Cuba to ensure that gender issues are included in public discussions. The study of penal codes in 19 countries will support their reform and the passing of legislation on intra-family violence. This is already under way in Chile, Colombia and Ecuador. Important studies on gender discrimination against girls and boys in eight countries, as well as on the socialization of gender roles in the Caribbean, will provide useful insight on family, school and community patterns in these countries.

26. In preparation for the Sixth Regional Women's Conference held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in September 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in September 1995, almost all countries produced national reports the situation of women. The Americas and Caribbean Regional Office (TACRO) produced a document on the empowerment of women and the rights of girls, which was widely circulated in the region. The document stresses that the future of girls and boys will depend to a great extent on improving the situation of women and promoting equitable economic and social policies.

C. Emergencies

27. The UNICEF humanitarian assistance programme in Haiti has been coordinated with other United Nations agencies and NGOs operating in the country, within the framework of the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Assistance emergency humanitarian assistance appeal. It has included (a) the immunization of children, particularly against measles, the provision of vitamin A, iron tablets and ORS and the production and distribution of supplementary food for malnourished children; (b) the emergency construction and rehabilitation of small water supply systems, the distribution of water in the slums of the capital and the organization of communities to maintain water points; (c) the provision of essential services for street children, child servants and children in institutions, as well as support for pre-school education; and (d) emergency-preparedness and stockpiling. In response to an earthquake on 6 June in central Colombia, UNICEF provided essential supplies for distribution by the Red Cross. UNICEF also supported improved water supply systems, sanitation and hygiene in two main areas affected by the disaster and two transit camps set up for the victims.

D. Use of global funds at the regional level

28. In 1994, the Special Adjustment Facility for Latin America and the Caribbean (SAFLAC) continued to place "development with a human face" issues on the regional agenda. In 1994, SAFLAC funded 16 country projects, amounting to a total of $3.2 million in general resources. These concentrated mainly on (a) social policy design and implementation; (b) decentralization of basic social services and NPAs; (c) advocacy and mobilization for children's rights; (d) capacity-building at national and local levels; and (e) strengthening of information systems for monitoring decade and mid-decade goals.

29. With funds from the Regional Fund for Programme Preparation and Evaluation (RFPPE), TACRO provided advisory services in the fields of social policy, planning and evaluation, health and nutrition, education, children's rights, women and gender, water supply and sanitation, advocacy and communications. Among the activities funded through RFPPE were (a) the interregional meeting on salt iodization discussed in paragraph 12 above; (b) work with the private sector regarding the use of ORT; (c) support to the network of Mayors as Defenders of Children and production of guidelines for municipal plans of action; (d) collaboration with the Government of Colombia in the organization of the Second American Meeting on Children and Social Policy, resulting in the Nariño Accord; and (e) production of prototype educational materials.

VI. REGIONAL OFFICE SUPPORT TO COUNTRY PROGRAMMES

30. A regional agenda of priorities and strategies is discussed and agreed annually with all UNICEF representatives and compiled in the regional work plan. In 1994, technical assistance was provided by regional office staff and a network of internal and external resource persons in all main programme areas for policy design, legislative reforms, programme and project design, and evaluation. Special attention was paid to Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico. Assistance to the 15 countries submitting their new programmes of cooperation to the Executive Board in 1996 is currently under way and will be a major focus of the 1995 regional work plan.

31. In 1994, the regional office supported workshops on the programming process, basic education, nutrition, female identity and leadership, operations and personnel management, global field support services and the new personnel appraisal system. In addition, an inter-agency workshop on acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) in the workplace was coordinated by the UNICEF regional office.

32. Following Executive Board approval of the restructuring of the Greeting Card and related Operations (GCO), work plans for private sector fund-raising and GCO product sales were prepared for priority countries. Further efforts are required to coordinate work with the GCO regional support centre at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in order to address emerging issues, such as the use of funds generated in the region and the design of private sector fund-raising strategies at the regional level. A plan of action is being developed with UNICEF Special Representative Mario Kreutzberger (Don Francisco) for advocacy and fund-raising in Latin America, and with the hispanic community in the United States, in collaboration with the United States National Committee for UNICEF.

VII. TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

33. By the end of the century, most countries in the region should have achieved the goals set at the World Summit for Children. In all countries, efforts must be made to sustain the investments made in the medium term and to bring up to date certain underserved areas, such as Brazil's north-east and parts of Haiti and Peru. Priority must be given to the control of ARI; systematic planning for improved nutrition; the betterment of women's conditions, especially the reduction of maternal mortality; the extension and improvement of social services; and the emerging problems of drug addiction, violence, accidents and AIDS.

34. Countries in the region will have to make substantial progress if they are to attain the education goals set for the decade, and even more in improvements in the quality of teaching, especially at pre-school and primary level.

35. It is in the sphere of children's rights that countries in the region face perhaps their greatest challenge. To put the Convention on the Rights of the Child into practice, countries need to move from a simple concept of protection and assistance towards the permanent guarantee of rights for children. The kind of citizenship that makes democracy real - and not just symbolic - begins with respect for the rights of children.

36. Many countries in the region have brought about profound economic reforms in the relation between the public and the private sectors through deregulation and privatization. While the role of local authorities has been strengthened through the process of decentralization, social reform, principally in health matters, is required in order to modernize administration. A focus on demand and needs would transfer power to the beneficiaries of social services and guarantee their participation based on recognition of their rights.

37. Two unsolved problems continue to pose a challenge for the viability of the present economic reforms: the generation of productive employment; and an improved distribution of wealth and income. Countries in the region need to develop systems of taxes and transfers to offset the more notorious disparities in wealth and to create a system of incentives to promote and defend employment, and not just to protect capital.

38. In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNICEF has begun to adjust its role to one of an institutional commitment to the defense of children's rights - including those of adolescents. This implies promoting a demand-driven approach, focusing on the beneficiary rather than on the services being offered. UNICEF must help to interpret children's needs and protect their rights, defending and developing the child's voice.